

9 May 1951

MEMORANDUM FOR: THE DIRECTOR
FROM: Acting Assistant Director for Intelligence Coordination
SUBJECT: Survey of Interdepartmental Committees

1. In making a survey of Interdepartmental Committees in which CIA has an interest we have attempted to isolate the questions in which you are primarily interested. These may be:

a. Question: Do we know what committees there are?

Answer: Yes. Attached hereto are three lists:

(1) A list of interdepartmental committees in which CIA has the chairmanship.

(2) A list of those committees on which CIA sits only as a member or an observer.

(3) A list of those committees which, though frequently referred to, have been found upon investigation to have been terminated.

b. Question: Are policy commitments being made in these interdepartmental committees and if so do the members have in each case authority to make the commitment?

Answer: It is not believed, from our survey, that CIA members of committees are making commitments for the Agency without proper authority. There are frequently occasions in which a CIA member undertakes to perform a task in the mutual interest of the Committee members which is at the same time in line with the functional responsibility of this Agency (and more specifically of his office). Many of these occur at the working level and, in fact, should be carried out on the responsibility of the Assistant Director concerned without reference to higher authority.

c. Question: Do other departments or agencies control CIA functions and decisions through the Committee device?

Answer: This is not believed to be the case. Other departments cannot control the kind of work CIA does if our people understand the Agency's functional responsibilities. It is believed

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that the officers concerned with interdepartmental committees are relatively clear on this matter and appreciate the need for top-level decision in this area. Furthermore the committees cannot assign workloads even in pursuance of proper responsibilities without the acquiescence of the assignees.

d. Question: Are the interdepartmental committees trying to discharge jointly responsibilities which clearly belong within a single agency?

Answer: In general this is not true, although the establishment of a committee commonly tends to make each administrator feel more comfortable because his problem is shared and therefore "solved." In fact, however, the establishment of an interdepartmental committee means that a systematic method is sought for consultation with other agencies. A committee may appropriately deal with problems where effective action requires each member agency to carry out its particular responsibility in proper timing and emphasis with the others. The existence of a committee cannot relieve the responsible official of any of his obligations and in general this principle is understood.

e. Question: Does proper coordination require these committees?

Answer: In many cases the formal committee provides the easiest way of carrying out the required coordination. In some other cases coordination could be as effectively achieved by other means. However, in deciding whether or not to kill a particular committee one must consider all factors including what the committee costs in man-hours and red-tape and its value as a convenience and psychological comfort. The ease or difficulty of termination is also an important consideration. It should be pointed out that there is an advantage in not establishing a committee through an NSCID or other formal instrument because of the difficulties which that presents in getting rid of the committee once it has outlived its usefulness.

f. Question: Are the interdepartmental committees in fact performing effectively and how can they be improved?

Answer: It is doubtful that any committee functions as effectively and as efficiently as we would like. A summary statement that we are doing well or badly is not very helpful. What is required is an examination and thereafter continuing alertness regarding the effectiveness of each committee and what steps can be taken for improvement. Initially each Assistant Director has the responsibility for being concerned and taking proper measures where necessary to see that committees under his own responsibility are effective. In addition it is my task to assist the Assistant Directors and yourself in seeking improvement. Suggestions for improvement may take different forms. Thus, for example, in the

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case of the Watch Committee O/IC in consultation with O/CI has submitted recommendations to you on what needs to be done and how we should proceed. In other cases suggestions have been made in the course of working with the Agency's committee chairmen or our representatives.

2. It is entirely to be expected that an agency such as CIA which has a sizeable coordinating role should use the formal committee as a technique or method in achieving coordination. Each administrator must realize, however, that he remains responsible for matters in his area whether there is a committee involved or not. The Director's problem, then, with respect to committees, becomes indistinguishable from the general problem of supervising the work of the major units of the Agency.

JAMES Q. REBER

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